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RECENT EXPLORATIONS IN NORTHWESTERN TEXAS

By WARREN K. MOOREHEAD

SOME years ago specimens were sent me from the Canadian valley in Texas. These seemed to indicate something different from the ordinary artifacts from the Southwest. As a result of the acquisition of these few objects two expeditions were sent up the Arkansas valley. The first passed through Oklahoma and Kansas, the local work in Oklahoma being left in charge of Professor J. B. Thoburn of the Oklahoma State Historical Society. This survey continued on up the main river to its source in Colorado. It crossed to the Canadian just over the New Mexico line, came down to Handley's ruins, and remained there three weeks, ending its season at Muskogee in November, 1917. Some thirty sites were found and mapped. In June, 1919, C. B. Franklin, Esq., was sent from Havana, Arkansas, through Oklahoma and up the main Arkansas into western Kansas, whence he crossed the panhandle of Texas to Handley's ruins. This survey mapped more than seventy sites. Mr. Franklin reported that ranchmen told him that there were other small stone buildings, or "Indian works," in out-of-the-way places farther up the river. Mr. Franklin paid particular attention to sites in Kansas along the main Arkansas, and on southern tributaries. He worked into northwestern Oklahoma, but found no particular change there. That is, the prevailing central Oklahoma types seem to continue up to the Cimarron river in the western panhandle of that State. His report is lengthy and he secured some 1500 specimens.

A search through the Peabody Museum library reveals very

scant reference to remains in the panhandle of Texas. Mr. Bandelier has stated that he heard of ruins on the upper Canadian, yet does not mention those farther down. I do not think he visited them.¹

J. T. Eyerly, Esq., wrote a brief article in "The Archaeological Bulletin," some twelve years ago. He presented a small map of the Handley ruins, then known as "Buried City." Dr. Fewkes visited the Handley ruins and excavated in one of the sites, securing

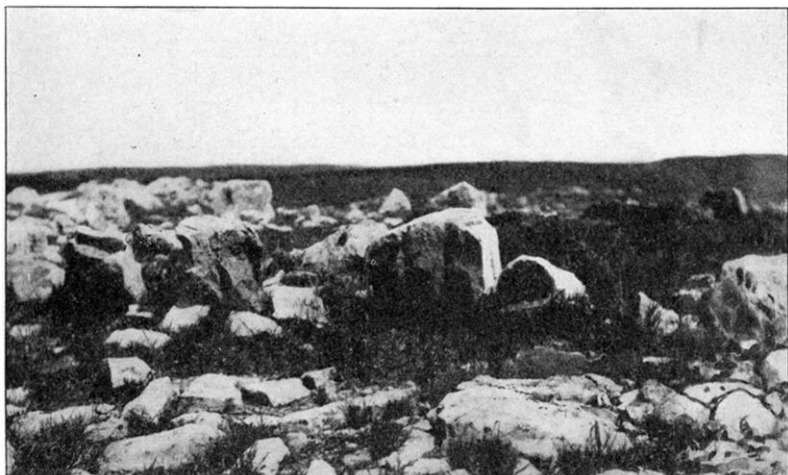


FIG. 1.—General view of one of the larger foundations in Handley's ruins, Ochiltree county, Texas.

therefrom a skeleton. Mr. James Mooney told me in Washington, some years ago, that he had heard of ruins in the northwestern part of Texas, and expressed the opinion that they should be examined. So far as I can ascertain at present, nothing was published concerning these ruins save Eyerly's brief account, and none of the observers seemed to have reported the larger groups of ruins located farther up the river.

After a careful study of the notes and specimens secured by Mr. Franklin, it appeared that the region was important archaeologically. Therefore, in January of this year I went to Oklahoma

¹ *Archaeological Institute of America*, Series IV, Part II, p. 137.

and Texas and spent considerable time traveling through the Canadian valley and tributaries of that stream. Returning east the latter part of March, arrangements were made for the financing of a large expedition. The specimens discovered in the course of explorations were to be placed in the University of Pennsylvania Museum. The survey located itself on the ranch owned by Messrs. Sam and Oscar Handley, Wolf creek, Ochiltree county. We found there more than twenty buildings of stone, varying from six or eight to twenty-three meters in diameter. (See fig. 1). The upper portions of all these have disappeared, and only the foundations remain, and these were from one to slightly over one meter in height. Ruins are scattered along a level plain, convenient to the creek, and covering approximately one square mile in area. Five of these were excavated, and the results added to those of the first and second surveys. Something like three hundred specimens were secured, chief among which were two restored vessels, one nearly complete vessel, and numerous metates, grinding stones, small minute arrow heads, stone knives, bone tools, etc.

About twenty-five miles southwest, on the main Canadian, is a similar group on the ranch of Archie King, Esq., and now named King's ruins. Farther up the river at Plemons are Cottonwood and Tarbox creeks. On both of these are more buildings or foundations than occur at either King's or Handley's. The Cottonwood and Tarbox ruins almost join, the creeks being no more than two miles apart, and the buildings and graves extend back from the cañon edges a considerable distance on the plain. In most of these structures the stones have been placed on edge and the space between outside and inside of wall filled with earth intermingled with small stones. The thickness of the walls ranges from one-fourth to one-half or occasionally two-thirds of a meter. (See fig. 2). All are in ruins, the stones scattered, and accurate observations difficult to make. In some of the smaller structures there appears to be a slightly raised ridge of hard earth. On, or in, this large stones were placed on edge. The interior was excavated somewhat and there is a distance of one to one and one-half meters from the inside floor to the tops of the larger stones. Still farther up the river, on Ante-

lope and Dixon creeks, about twenty-five miles north of the town of Panhandle, are other groups of ruins. In the valley of Antelope, on a second terrace, stand the foundations of a building nearly fifty meters in length. Proceeding to the Landergin ranch, forty miles north of Amarillo, is yet another group. This one is somewhat

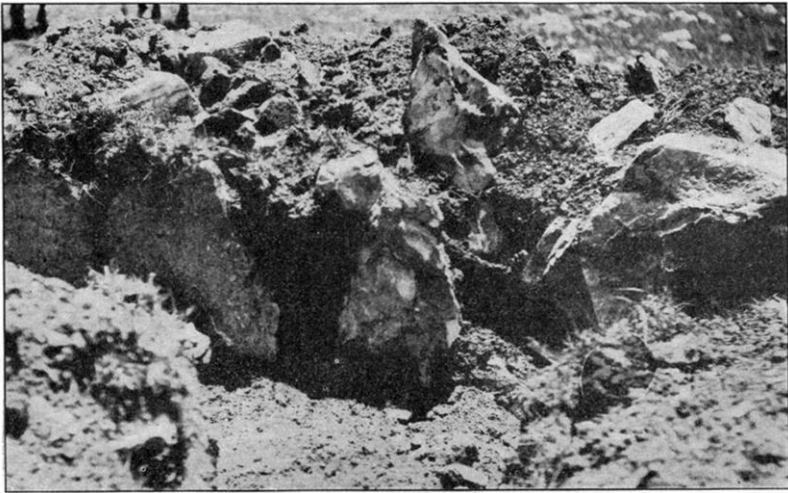


FIG. 2.—Excavation to base of the wall of a building on Handley's ranch, showing stones in position.

different from the others in that it is situated in a high pinnacle approximately one hundred meters above the plain. The space upon the summit is less than an acre in extent, and there are twenty-two foundations, nearly all of which are circular. There is no water on this summit and the nearest spring is more than a mile distant. A creek, half a mile away, is dry save during the rainy season. At the time the hill-top was occupied these people may have been able to secure water, but our party was unable to find any trace of a spring nearer than the one mentioned. An aged Mexican (nearly 80) named Isabel, living at the ranch, states there is no water save that spring, and that the Kiowa and Comanche and Apache, at various times, camped on the hill-top for protection. He visited them fifty or sixty years ago. They found the ruins there, but used the stones in building low walls, fireplaces, etc. He says they did not make foundations for their lodges.

The expedition of 1920 did not extend operations beyond the Landergin ranch for the reason that it had collected sufficient photographs, specimens, and data for a preliminary survey of the region. We were informed by cattlemen, who are familiar with the range between Amarillo and the Pecos valley in New Mexico, that similar ruins continue almost to the head of the Canadian.



FIG. 3.—Figure cut in sandstone bluff, Sam Hallock's ranch, Cimarron county, Okla.
Thought by Thorburn to represent a Spaniard in armor.

The pottery becomes more of the Pueblo-Cliff Dweller type, and in some of the ruins farther west, painted pottery is said to be found. I am willing to accept this, since all information given us by cattlemen was found to be correct.

As a result of the last expedition, we have mapped nearly one

hundred sites or places where aboriginal work was in evidence. In Meade county, Kansas, we found irrigation ditches covering some seven to nine miles. This is the farthest east that such have been reported, so far as I can ascertain. Meade county was not settled in early times, but at a comparatively recent period. Broken pottery, flint chips, arrowheads, broken metates, and those curious objects made of lava, common in Arizona and New Mexico, were found.

In the Oklahoma panhandle, along the Cimarron, we discovered several series of pictographs. (See fig. 3). Whether these are the most extensive in the United States, I do not know, but they are scattered through eight miles of bluffs, and upwards of three hundred were noted by Mr. Johnson, Professor Thoburn, and myself. Quite a few were photographed and others drawn by us. They are com-

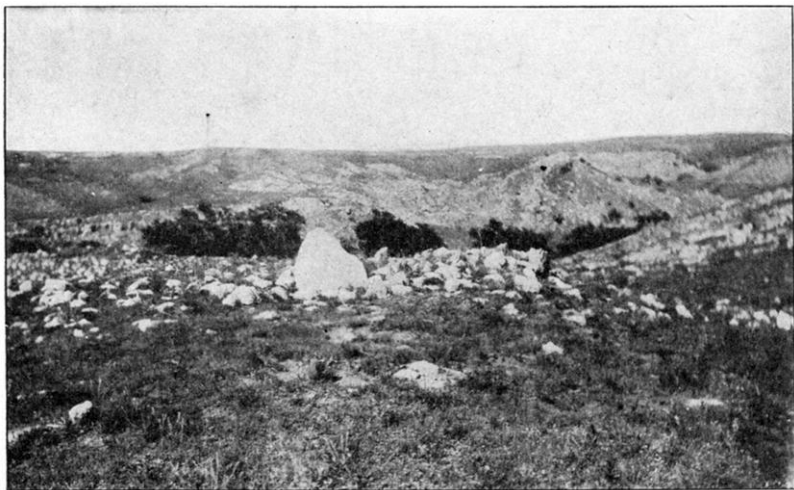


FIG. 4.—A ruin on Cottonwood creek, with graves in the foreground.

mon, we are told, along the river for miles. All should be studied and copied. Many of them were exceedingly well executed, are spirited, full of action, and evince no little artistic ability. Some of them are in color, others cut in the stone. Vandals have carved their names over and near many of these pictographs. The state of Oklahoma has been requested to take action to insure their preser-

vation. One large buffalo is painted life size, and will compare with the poorer of the paintings found on the walls of French caverns. We placed signs some distance from the pictographs, requesting people not to deface these remarkable examples of aboriginal pictorial art.

The survey of 1920 has opened a new field in American archaeology. (See fig. 4). On Cottonwood and Tarbox creeks alone, there are one hundred and nine stone graves in one group and more than

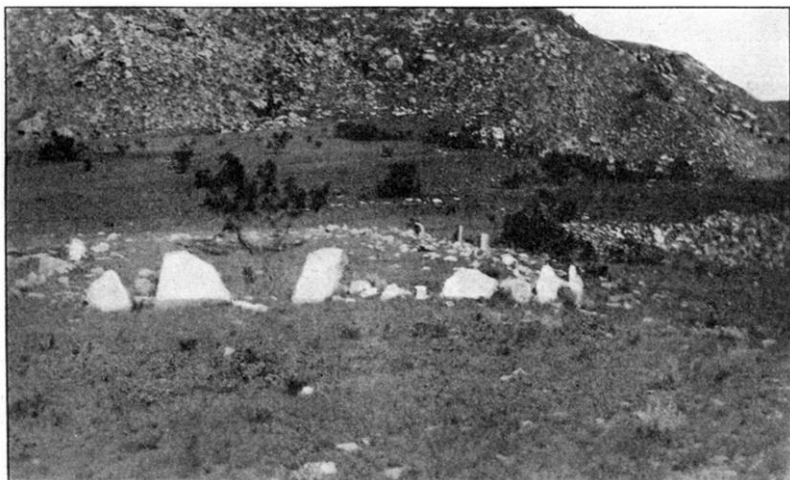


FIG. 5.—A large ruin on the second terrace, Antelope creek.

forty buildings. On Antelope creek, ruins are scattered through three miles of mesa, second terrace, and lower terrace of the valley. All we could do was to photograph, measure, and excavate. We carried a crew of eight men, but did not have time to examine more than fifty or sixty graves, and we excavated in twenty or twenty-five buildings. The graves are somewhat like those in Tennessee. Many are lined with flat slabs, not a few have stones placed on edge enclosing a space two by one-half meters. At a slight distance they give the impression of white men's burials, yet they are strictly aboriginal.

Few regions in the Painted Desert present a more weird aspect than the Cottonwood, Antelope, Tarbox, Dixon, or Landergin sites.

(See fig. 5). There is little vegetation save cottonwoods in the valleys. The cañons are brightly colored by disintegrated rocks in red, brown, white, and blue shades. Most of the groups do not appear to have been visited by any one save the few cattlemen of the region.

From a little distance, the large flat stones, on edge, and spaced more or less regularly, give the impression of miniature Stonehenges. It is estimated that two or three winters' work are necessary to make proper explorations. Summers are very hot and there is a scarcity of good water, hence winter is the best season for field operations.

The results of our labors will be set forth in a volume devoted to the archaeology of the Arkansas valley, to be published at some future time, and it is therefore a little premature to offer conclusions, yet the writer would present a few observations based on the work done.

Beginning in central Oklahoma, we note a change from the general culture of the Mississippi valley tribes. The grooved axe almost disappears, and a notched hand hatchet takes its place. The pottery of the middle Mississippi valley group begins to change, and little of it is found beyond Havana, Arkansas; and practically none occurs at Muskogee, Oklahoma.

In central Oklahoma, the small mano stone appears in large numbers, and the pestle of eastern form disappears; this is significant, it seems to the writer. There is no sudden change, although a gradual one, until we reach Jackson's ranch, seven miles down Wolf creek from Handley's ruins. Here we find the first stone buildings, rectangular in form, and the stones placed on edge instead of laid flat. This is characteristic of most of the ruins in the panhandle that the stones are placed on edge. Man has not yet learned to build a good wall for his house.

Several characteristics are common to all of these structures. They are not large, they are rudimentary, and to the writer's mind they mark the beginning of architecture in stone in the Southwest. The fact that buildings are very small but seven miles from the larger and more developed group on the Handley's ranch,

is not surprising. The large group mentioned was probably constructed a few generations later than the first ones. Or, the people may have first built small settlements such as we found on Turkey and other creeks. Omission is made, in this article, of several lesser sites. As the people increased in numbers and perfected construction, the larger groups, such as Cottonwood, Tarbox, Dixon, and Handley's, came into being by gradual and natural evolution. (See fig. 6).



FIG. 6.—Large stones forming part of the walls of a building on Tarbox creek.

It is suggested to other observers that the many scattered stones found throughout the region, and especially those which still lie in circles, were used to hold edges of skin tipis, there being little wood outside of the valleys. The region is noted for very severe high winds and heavy stones are needed to hold down tent edges. From use of stones to hold down the tipi or brush-covered lodge, to use of more stones, is a step the intelligent Indian soon took. Abundance of suitable rock in the cañons and draws afforded him material. Thin slabs, a meter or more in length, set on edge, and other slabs to form a second row, gave the natives a foundation on which might be laid a low adobe wall. Between the stones he filled in earth. We do not know the nature of the roof, whether

it was composed of cottonwood timbers on which was placed earth, or of skins. It is quite apparent that we should not class all these stone structures as erected by a tribe which later perfected the Pueblo style of architecture on mesas, in valleys or cliffs. This, for the reason that many of the stone circles are not house foundations, and also that certain of the ruins do not contain enough stone to represent substantial foundations. A bird's-eye view of the several hundred buildings visited by the expedition, would indicate that they mark the transition period from residence in skin-covered tipis to—

1. Small foundations with pole and skin coverings.
2. Thicker walls, probably adobe construction above.
3. Stones laid flat—rudimentary Pueblo-Cliff Dweller construction.

The Pueblo people did occasionally migrate and we have some historical references to certain of them building in western Kansas. However, it is suggested that these Canadian valley ruins are not pure Pueblo. Next to architecture, the dominant factor of Pueblo-Cliff Dweller culture is the high ceramic art these people developed. It is but two hundred miles from the Landerkin ruins to Pecos Pueblo, where the art was high. The able researches of Dr. Kidder and Dr. Guthe have proved this. It is unthinkable that Indians would lose, or discard, their skill as potters in traveling that distance. There has been no true Pueblo-Cliff Dweller pottery found on any of the sites visited by our party. Therefore, one is led to believe that the Canadian valley culture developed as it proceeded westward, rather than that these sites are mere outposts of those well-known Pueblo people.

As to the age of these remains, nothing positive can be affirmed. The King and Handley ruins are built upon a previous village site where buffalo, bear, antelope, and other bones have been found, one-half to one meter below the foundations. This is not where an overflow from a stream has occurred, although it may be due to a gradual wash from the hillsides, one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty meters distant.

None of the stones used in the houses were dressed, and there

are several openings or doorways in most of the larger structures. The floors were ordinary clay, hard packed. No turquoise and no ocean shells were found in the rooms. The oldest Apache, Comanche, and Kiowa were assembled in council five times during March, 1920, on the reservation near Anadarko, Oklahoma, by the writer. Upwards of a hundred Indians were interviewed. The older men remembered hunting buffalo in the panhandle, and some of them were in the Adobe Walls fight of 1874. They all stated that they had ridden over many of these ruins, but knew nothing concerning the building of them; that the old men of those days also were ignorant; they occasionally camped on top of the bluff at Landergin's ranch, but their people did not build the stone circles there.

I regret that space does not permit presentation of illustrations of more of the buildings and the pottery. It is not Mississippi valley form; it is not Pueblo; it probably marks the transition. Finally, there is nothing found indicating Mexican origin or Pueblo influence. On the contrary, so far as the writer can observe, we have a tribe originally living in the buffalo country and of "Plains Culture" status which changed as it spread westward up the Canadian. They also built irrigation ditches farther up the streams from their villages. As they moved farther away from the buffalo country they continued to change and develop until they established themselves in permanent villages—were no longer nomads—and finally became the Pueblo-Cliff Dweller people.

ANDOVER, MASS.